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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIJING 013394

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: SCHOLAR ON CHALLENGES TO HU-WEN "OPENNESS"
INITIATIVES

REF: A. BEIJING 11231
[1](#)B. BEIJING 11465

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor Kin Moy.
Reason. 1.5 (b), (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The new "Hu-Wen" government is attempting to push openness in a number of areas, both to demonstrate its closeness to the people and as an antidote to corruption, according to Beijing University Institute of Political Development and Governance Director Xie Qingkun. That agenda has suffered setbacks recently with the tightening of media controls and the Politburo Standing Committee's rejection of an initiative to require financial disclosure statements from officials. Xie tied the media tightening to caution in advance of the Party Plenum and also recent criticism of Jiang Zemin. He opined that initiatives aimed at curbing corruption are being hampered by vested interests. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) In a wide-ranging discussion of the current political scene with poloff September 19, director of Beijing University's Institute of Political Development and Governance Xie Qingkun echoed the views of other contacts here that both President and Party General Secretary Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao (referred to as the "Hu-Wen government") are pushing for greater openness in government and party operations in order to promote closeness to the people and as an antidote to corruption. Xie noted that the SARS crisis had helped them push this agenda, but that recent attempts to push transparency have encountered setbacks.

Media Clampdown

[1](#)3. (C) While Hu had taken some small steps to make the media more "relevant" after assuming office, Xie stated that media controls have now been tightened, referring to a recent party directive to avoid discussions of political reform (refs). He believes this is directly tied to a perceived need to show unity in advance of the October Party Plenum by limiting public debate. Xie also believes that Party authorities are concerned about criticism of Jiang Zemin in newspapers, and especially on some web sites, in advance of the decision to include the Three Represents in the Chinese constitution is an additional factor behind the tightening.

Financial Disclosures Rejected

¶4. (C) Xie also reported that an initiative of the "Hu-Wen government" to require financial disclosure statements from high-level government officials and their families was rejected by the Politburo Standing Committee, with only Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao voting in support of the measure. Xie noted that this shows that Hu has not consolidated power in the Politburo, and that its members remain wedded to opacity where their own sources of income are concerned. Such a measure would particularly threaten the children of high-level leaders, Xie said.

Comment

¶5. (C) Reforms in China rarely proceed in a straightforward manner. While Hu effectively used greater media openness during the SARS epidemic to forestall criticism against the Party, such moves are certain to cause concern among those who fear that more open discourse will "get out of hand" and spark widespread anger against the Party itself. Similarly, financial disclosure is not a new concept in China; various initiatives have been announced over the years. What is most interesting in Xie's comments is the strong belief, shared by many of our contacts, that Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao form a team, and that this team is pressing for systemic change within the system against resistance within the Party. Such sentiments are the basis of the growing popular support for Hu Jintao, in particular.

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